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THE

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THE KINDLY ONES

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WELL? HOW LONG IS IT GOING TO *TAKE*?

TRAGEDY STRUCK THIS EVENING FOR A TORRANCE COUPLE CELEBRATING A SPECIAL DAY.

***LOOK***, WE CALLED YOU ALMOST TWO ***HOURS*** AGO. I MEAN, THIS IS A ***KIDNAPPING***, FOR CHRISSAKES.

HARVEY AND VONDA RAMSEY CLIMBED OVER ***THIS*** FENCE TO ***THIS*** LOCAL BEAUTY SPOT AND BOATING LAKE, WHERE THEY CLIMBED INTO ONE OF ***THESE*** LITTLE ROW BOATS.

I'M NOT CURSING AT ***YOU***, OKAY, LADY. I'M JUST CURSING.

UH, H-HARVEY WAS SO HA-***HAPPY***. HE HAD THIS BOTTLE OF FRENCH CHAMPAGNE, AND HE SAID IT WAS TIME TO TOAST ME, AND HE STOOD UP AND I SAID *HARVEY, DON'T STAND UP*, BUT HE SAID, *VONDA, HONEY, IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY*, AND HE...

***FINE***, IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. BUT I HOPE ***YOU*** UNDERSTAND ***MY*** FRUSTRATION WITH--

IT WAS OUR TUH-TENTH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY NEXT WEEK.

I ***TOLD*** HIM. I ***TOLD*** HIM TO SIT DOWN. AND THEN HE, AHH, HE...

NO. ***NO***, OF ***COURSE*** I DON'T ***WANT*** YOUR ***JOB***.

I JUST WANT TO SEE SOME ***COPS*** HERE.

***RIGHT***. WELL, I DON'T LIKE ***YOUR*** ATTITUDE EITHER, SO THAT MAKES ***TWO*** OF US.

UH, TENTH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY? THAT'S ***TIN***, ISN'T IT, MARY?

I THINK IT ***IS***, RAY. ON A LIGHTER NOTE, TOMORROW IS THE FIRST DAY OF NATIONAL JAZZERCISE WEEK AND TO CELEBRATE...

COW.

SHE SAYS THEY'RE COMING. LYTA?

MM.

THEY'RE ON THEIR WAY.

LYTA?

LYTA, HONEY, THE *POLICE* ARE HERE TO SEE YOU.

MIZZ HALL?

I'M LIEUTENANT LUKE PINKERTON. I'M WITH THE *LA* POLICE DEPARTMENT. THIS IS MY PARTNER, GORDY FELLOWES...

MA'AM.

NOW, I UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR SON HAS BEEN ABDUCTED. THIS IS OBVIOUSLY A *VERY* TRAUMATIC TIME FOR YOU. WE DON'T WANT TO MAKE IT ANY HARDER.

DANIEL. HIS NAME IS DANIEL.

DANIEL. *RIGHT.* CAN YOU TELL US WHAT HAPPENED?

I WENT OUT THIS EVENING. LUX'S. IT'S A RESTAURANT. I GOT A BAD FEELING AND WANTED TO COME HOME. WHEN I GOT HERE MY SON HAD BEEN STOLEN.

THE BABYSITTER WAS ASLEEP ON THE FLOOR.

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA OF *ANY* PERSON WHO COULD HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE?

NO.

MA'AM, CAN WE TALK TO THE CHILD'S FATHER?

SURE. YOU GOT A OUIJA BOARD WITH YOU?

HE'S *DEAD?*

HE'S BEEN DEAD A LONG TIME.

I SEE. *I'M* SORRY. DO YOU HAVE ANY *ENEMIES?* IS THERE ANYONE WHO'S SHOWED ANY, UH, UNDUE *INTEREST* IN YOUR SON?

NO. NOBODY REAL.

YOUR *BABYSITTER.* YOU SAY SHE WAS ASLEEP?

SHE USE *DRUGS?*

SHE BABYSIT FOR YOU *OFTEN?*

LIKE A DEAD THING.

I WOULDN'T HAVE ENTRUSTED MY SON TO SOMEONE WHO DIDN'T SEEM VERY RESPONSIBLE.

LIEUTENANT PINKWATER--

*PINKERTON.* LIKE THE DETECTIVE AGENCY. *PINKERTON.*

LIEUTENANT PINKERTON, I'VE HARDLY BEEN OUT OF THE HOUSE IN THREE YEARS.

I ONLY WENT OUT THIS EVENING BECAUSE I'D BEEN OFFERED A JOB, AND MY FRIEND CARLA WANTED ME TO AT LEAST MEET THE GUY AND TALK ABOUT IT.

HE DROVE ME BACK HERE.

SO, NO, SHE'S NOT MY REGULAR BABYSITTER, BUT I DON'T HAVE A REGULAR BABYSITTER.

SHE'S LOOKED AFTER DANIEL A FEW TIMES NOW. HE LIKES HER. HE CALLS HER *WOSIE*.

DO YOU KNOW HOW... WHOEVER TOOK YOUR SON... GOT ***IN*** TO THE APARTMENT?

THE DOORS WERE LOCKED. THERE WAS A WINDOW OPEN IN MY BEDROOM. MAYBE THEY GOT OUT THROUGH THERE. I DON'T KNOW.

YEAH. ***WELL***, IT'S A ***POSSIBILITY***.

WE'LL TAKE A LOOK AROUND, NOW, IF YOU DON'T MIND. AND I'LL ***NEED*** TO TALK TO THE BABYSITTER.

SHE'S DOWNSTAIRS. THAT'S WHERE SHE LIVES.

SHE WANTED TO ***STAY*** UP HERE, BUT LYTA MADE HER GO HOME. THE POOR KID WAS ***REALLY*** UPSET.

MIZZ HALL? WE'RE TRYING TO ***HELP***. YOU KNOW THAT?

YES. I DO.

WE CAN ONLY DO THAT IF ***YOU*** HELP ***US***.

I AM HELPING YOU.

***HEY!*** THIS OUTSIDE DOOR. ALL THE ***LOCKS*** HAVE BEEN MESSED UP.

***MA'AM?*** I THOUGHT YOU SAID THE DOORS WERE ***LOCKED*** WHEN YOU GOT HERE.

THEY WERE.

WELL, THESE LOCKS ARE ***DESTROYED***. IT LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE HIT THIS DOOR WITH A ***TRUCK***.

ME.

IT WASN'T A TRUCK. THE KEY GOT STUCK. SO I PUSHED.

THAT WAS ME.

THANKS FOR ALL YOUR HELP, LADY.
YEAH. WELL. NO PROBLEM.
LISTEN, YOUR FRIEND. IS SHE OKAY?
NO. OF COURSE SHE'S NOT OKAY. HER SON'S BEEN KIDNAPPED. SHE'S IN SHOCK.
BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT YOU MEANT, WAS IT. YOU MEANT, IS SHE CRAZY. RIGHT?
WELL...
YES, MA'AM.
WELL, LYTA'S MY BEST FRIEND. AND SHE REALLY DID FORCE THE DOOR OPEN.
SHE'S...SHE'S VERY STRONG. WHEN SHE GETS UPSET. LIKE THE OLD HULK TV SHOW, Y'KNOW. "YOU WOULDN'T LIKE ME WHEN I GET ANGRY."
AND RIGHT NOW, SHE'S OBVIOUSLY VERY UPSET.
BUT SHE'LL BE FINE, WHEN SHE GETS DANIEL BACK.
YOU GOING TO STAY HERE WITH HER?
FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS, SURE.
YOU'LL CALL US AS SOON AS YOU FIND ANYTHING?
OF COURSE.
LISTEN, MA'AM.
LET ME PUT THIS BLUNTLY. THERE'S NO POINT IN PESTERING US FOR INFORMATION. AS SOON AS WE KNOW ANYTHING WE'LL LET YOU KNOW.
WE'RE GOING TO WANT TO RETURN, TALK TO THE BABYSITTER, HAVE A LOOK AROUND IN THE DAYLIGHT, ALL THAT KIND OF THING.
WHAT IF THERE'S A RANSOM DEMAND? OR IF WE FIND OUT ANYTHING ON OUR OWN?
THEN YOU GET IN TOUCH WITH US IMMEDIATELY. YOU'VE GOT MY CARD?
YES.
AND MA'AM? TAKE CARE OF YOUR FRIEND.
I'LL TRY.
IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO.

# THE KINDLY ONES! 2

WRITTEN BY
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SANDMAN CHARACTERS CREATED BY GAIMAN, KIETH & DRINGENBERG

HAIL!

HALT, STRANGER, AND ANNOUNCE YOURSELF.

CLURACAN OF FAERIE. AMBASSADOR-IN-EXTRAORDINARY TO HER MAJESTY, THE QUEEN OF THE SEELIE COURT.

AND YOU ARE HERE AS AN *ENVOY*, CLURACAN? WE WERE NOT NOTIFIED THAT WE SHOULD EXPECT YOU.

I AM HERE AS A PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL. I HAVE COME TO SEE MY SISTER, THE LADY NUALA, WHO RESIDES IN THIS REALM.

AH.

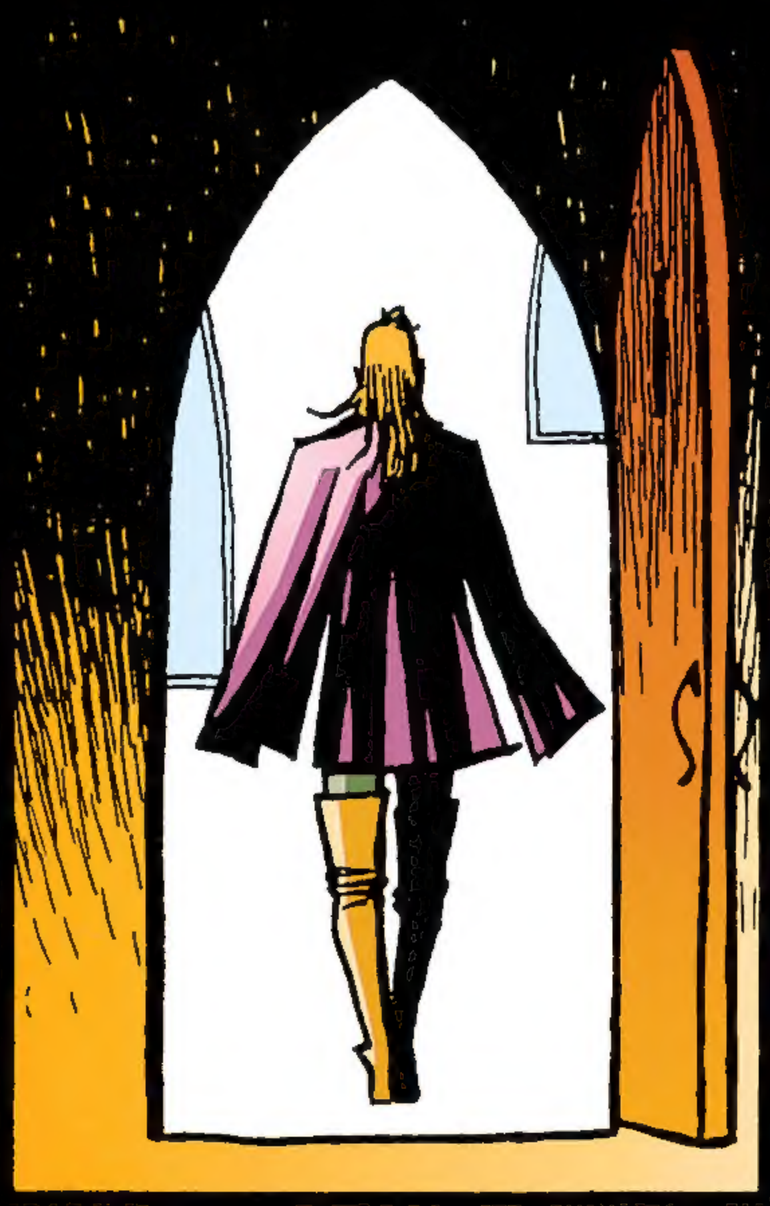
WAIT THERE.

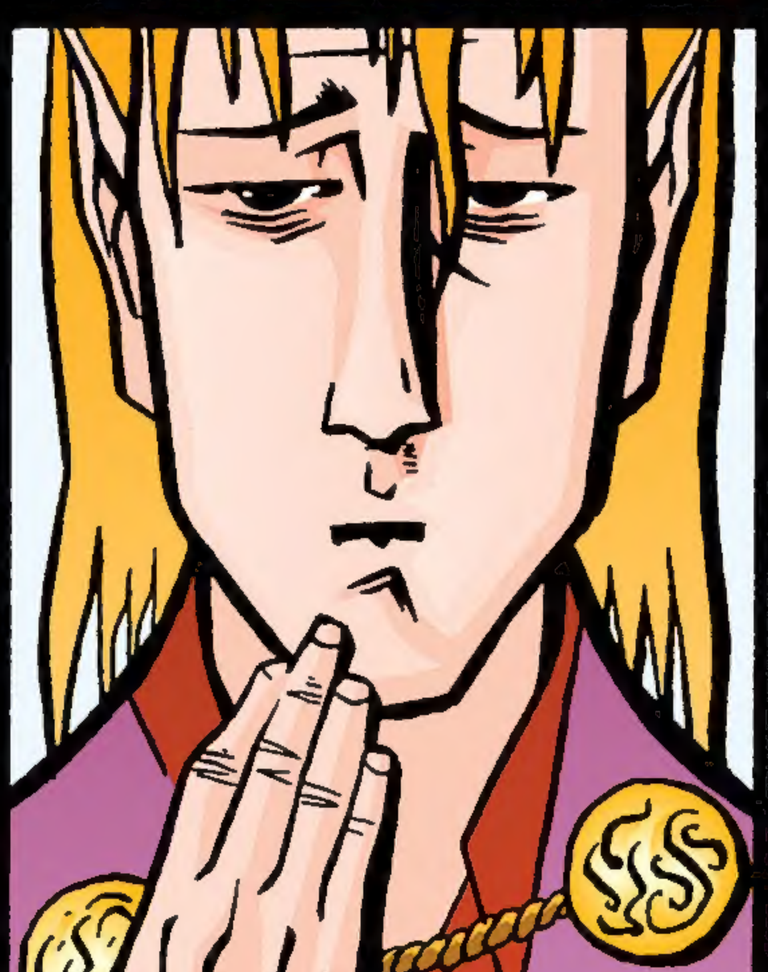
WE HAVE CONFERRED WITH OUR LORD. YOU ARE TO BE ADMITTED, AS A GUEST; UPON THE UNDERSTANDING THAT YOU ARE SOLELY AND WHOLLY RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR ACTIONS.

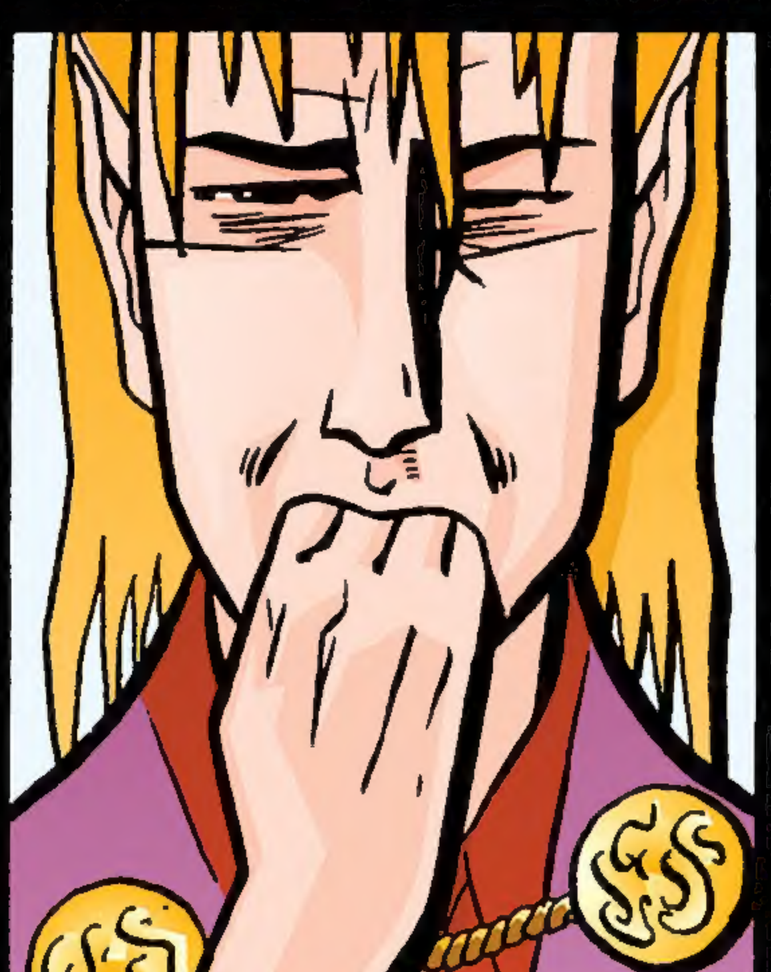
BUT OF COURSE.

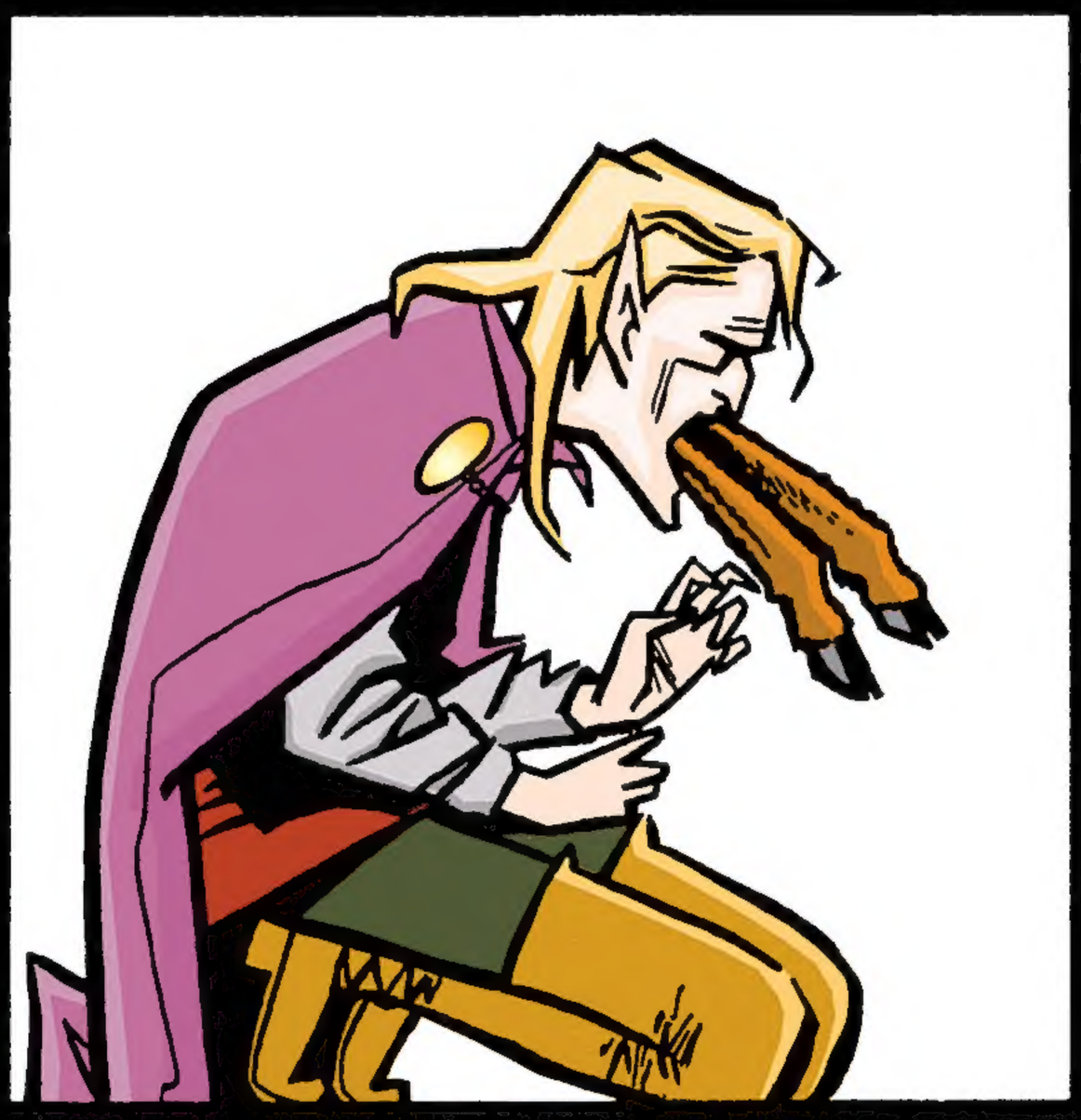
VERY WELL, CLURACAN. DISMOUNT AND ENTER. LEAVE YOUR HORSE HERE. IT WILL BE STABLED AND GROOMED.

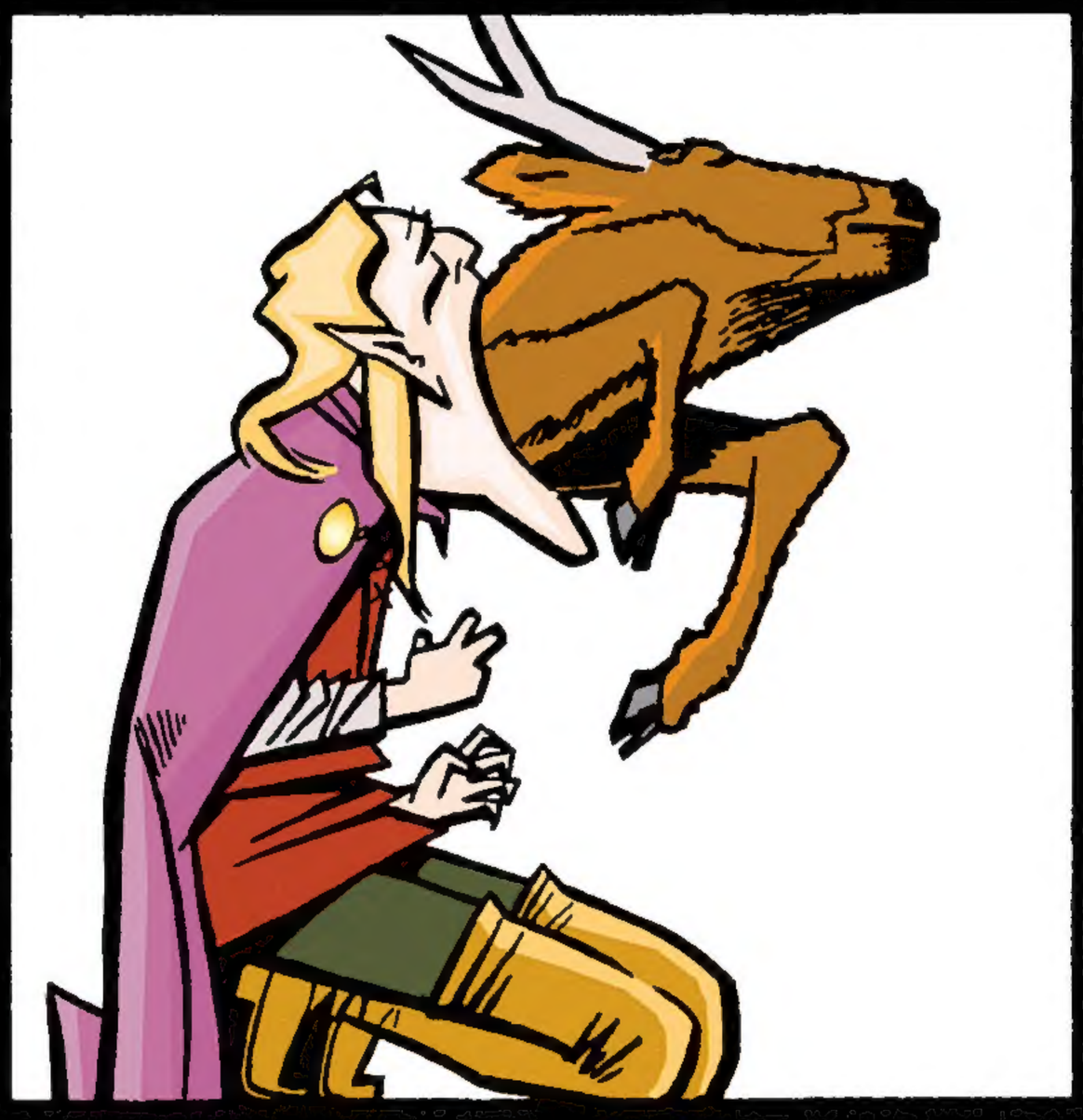
FAIRY. KEEP TO THE PATH AND IT WILL TAKE YOU TO YOUR SISTER.

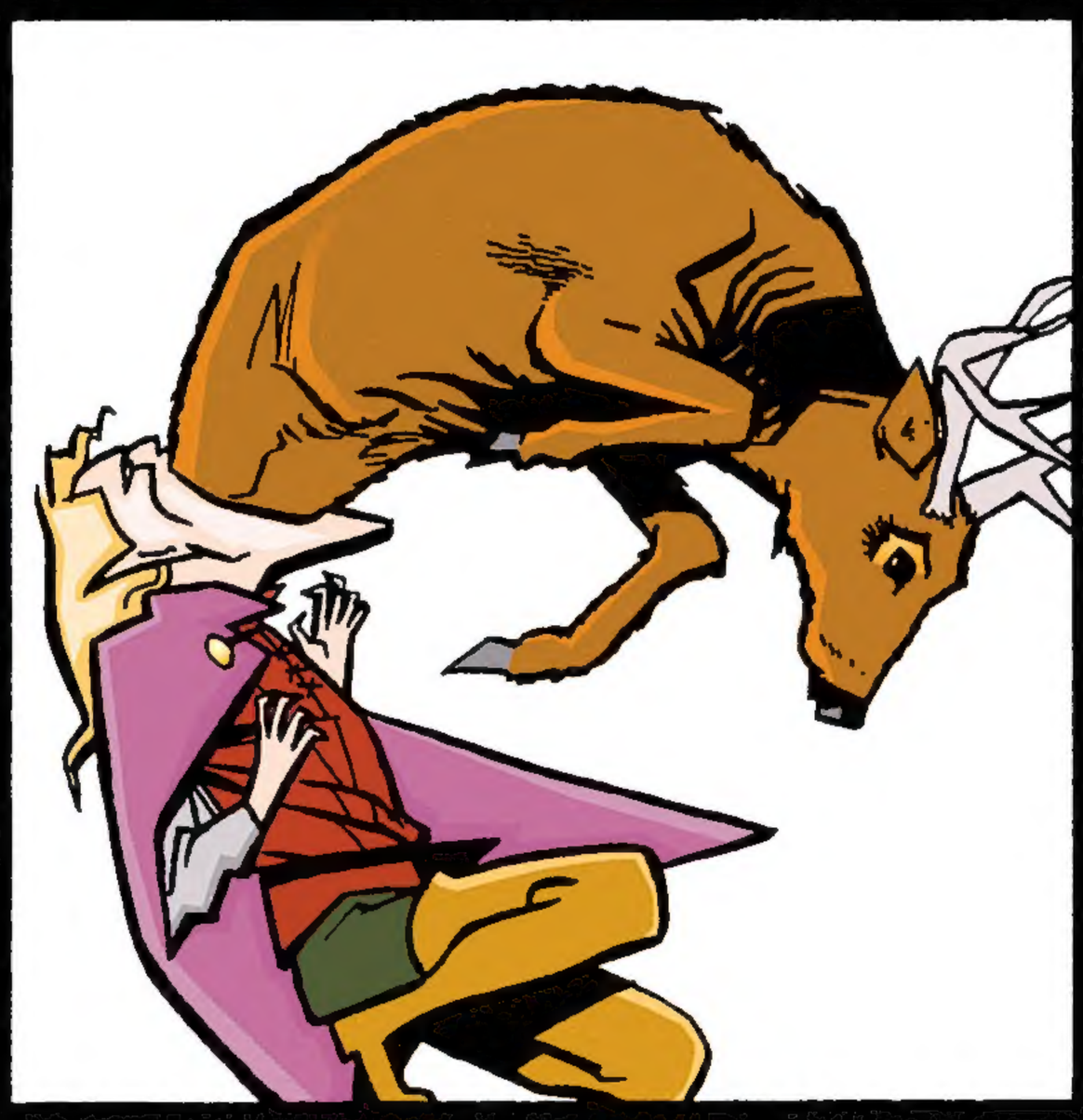


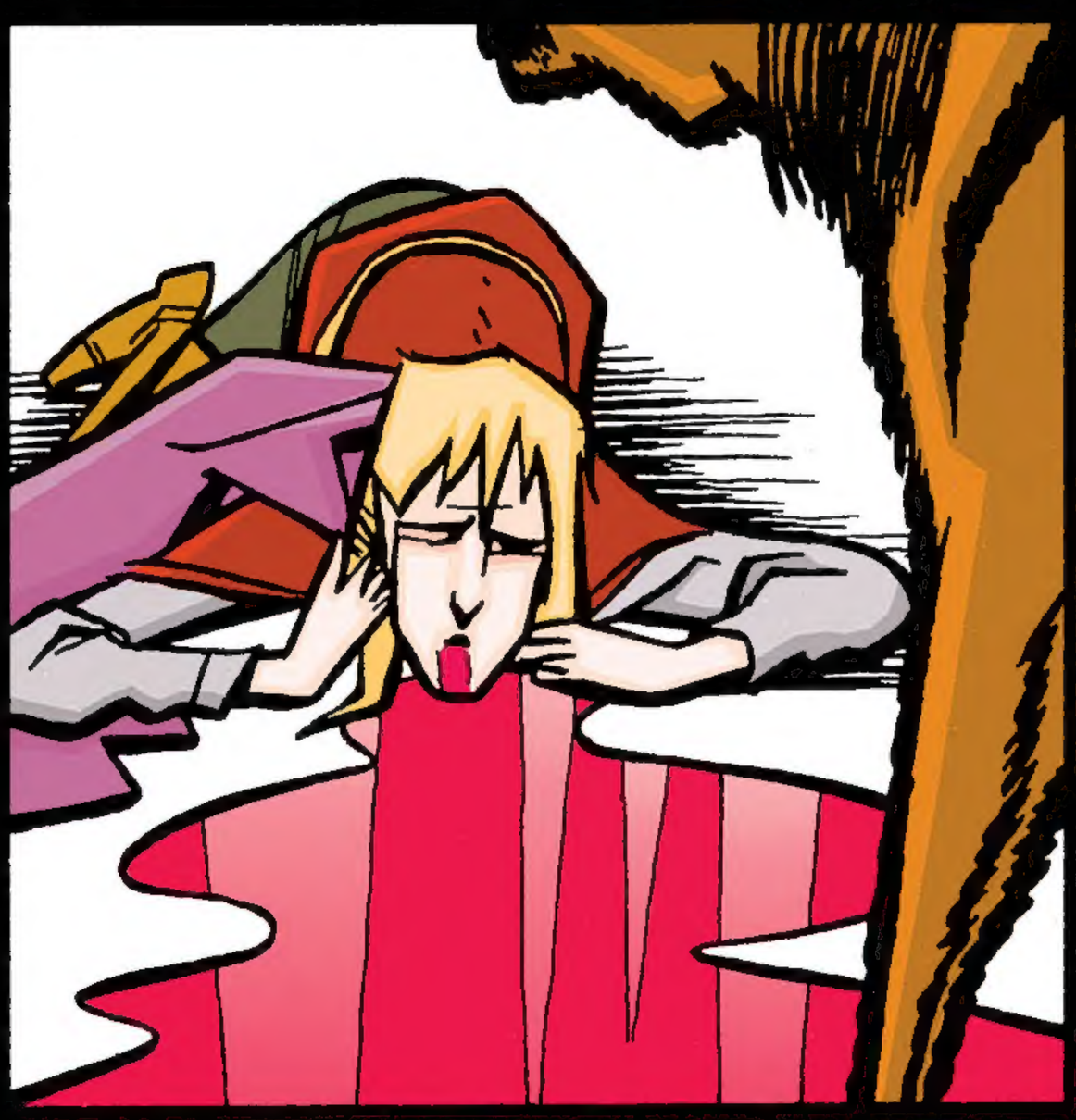












YOU ARE AN *IDIOT*. I DON'T BE*LIEVE* IT.

YOU CAN JUST COUNT YOURSELF *LUCKY* THAT THE GRYPHON TOLD ME YOU WERE COMING, AND I RAN DOWN HERE TO *MEET* YOU.

HOW *COULD* YOU?

CLURACAN, HOW *COULD* YOU?

AND THAT *STAG*. DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU *DID* IN THERE? YOU COULD HAVE BEEN *KILLED*!

THAT WAS YOUR *NEMESIS*.

YOU'VE CREATED YOUR *NEMESIS*.

HOW *COULD* YOU?

YOU *HAVE* TO KEEP TO THE PROPER PATHS IN THIS PLACE. IT'S RAW DREAMSTUFF. IT'S *DANGEROUS*.

LET'S GO TO MY QUARTERS.

I...

I MEANT NO *HARM*. I WAS CURIOUS...

I...

I'M SORRY. *TRULY* SORRY. IT WAS A *MOST* STUPID THING TO DO.

OH, CLURACAN. I *AM* PLEASED TO SEE YOU. IT'S JUST I *WISH* YOU'D STOP AND THINK BEFORE YOU *DID* THINGS. YOU COULD HAVE GOTTEN YOURSELF INTO *SO* MUCH TROUBLE.

WELL, YOU SORT OF *HAVE* DONE, HAVEN'T YOU? WHAT ON *EARTH* POSSESSED YOU TO *RAISE* THE WILD HART?

I DIDN'T REALIZE.

THERE WAS SOMETHING IN MY THROAT. *TICKLING.* I HAD TO GET IT *OUT.*

HMPH. *AND* YOU'RE LATE.

LATE?

YOU SAID YOU WOULD COME AND *SEE* ME. *SOON,* YOU SAID. THAT WAS THREE *YEARS* AGO.

SIT DOWN OVER THERE.

AH. YES. I SUPPOSE I *AM* A LITTLE LATE. OUR QUEEN HAS KEPT ME BUSY.

WHO DID YOUR *DECORATING?*

THE LORD SHAPER GAVE ME THESE QUARTERS; HE HAD THE PALACE CREW MAKE THEM LOOK LIKE THIS. IT WAS *KIND* OF HIM.

WOULD YOU LIKE SOMETHING TO *EAT?* THERE ARE MANY FLOWERS HERE, AND FINE NECTARS TO DRINK.

I'LL TAKE *WINE,* IF YOU HAVE SOME. A RED.

MM. I *WISH* YOU WOULDN'T DRINK *SO MUCH.* I DON'T THINK IT'S *GOOD* FOR YOU. I'LL FIND SOME FOR YOU.

NUALA...

SOME MONTHS AGO I VISITED YOU IN MY DREAMS; YOU SENT LORD SHAPER TO FREE ME FROM SOME BOTHER I WAS IN.

REALLY? I...

ANYWAY. SHORTLY AFTER THAT, I FOUND MYSELF CAUGHT IN A... STORM.

I TOOK REFUGE IN THE *INN AT THE END OF ALL WORLDS.* IT'S ONE OF THE FOUR FREE HOUSES--

I HAVE *HEARD* OF THE PLACE.

AND I SAW CERTAIN *THINGS* THERE.

WHAT *KIND* OF THINGS?

I'D RATHER NOT SAY. I SAW CERTAIN THINGS, THROUGH A WINDOW, AND, WHEN THE STORM WAS OVER, I RETURNED HOME AND TOLD THEM TO OUR LADY, AND SHE...

WELL, SHE SENT ME HERE.

SHE SENT YOU? BUT YOU'RE NOT HERE AS AN OFFICIAL ENVOY--?

NO. I'M NOT. SHE SENT ME TO TALK TO YOU.

SHE SAYS IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO COME HOME.

OH.

POP!

=SNIF=

WON'T IT BE WONDERFUL?

IT WILL BE SO VERY FINE, WITH YOU ONCE MORE IN FAERIE. THE SEELIE COURT HAS DOZENS OF DELIGHTFUL NEW INTRIGUES FOR YOU TO CATCH UP ON.

AND YOU CAN BE BEAUTIFUL AGAIN.

YOU CAN BE THE ICE MAIDEN ONCE MORE. LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI, EH?

HOW MANY YOUNG MEN KILLED THEMSELVES FOR LOVE OF YOU OVER THE YEARS, MY SISTER? HOW MANY SIMPLY PALED AND PINED AWAY FOR YOU?

THEY'LL BE DOING IT AGAIN. *DROVES* OF THEM. POSITIVE MULTITUDES. *HORDES.*

"O, NUALA, DO YOU BUT GLANCE IN MY GENERAL DIRECTION ELSE I MUST SURELY DIE."

I'VE NEVER HAD *YOUR* TALENT FOR ATTRACTING MEN. WHEN YOU HAVE YOUR *GLAMOUR* ON, OF COURSE. NOT *NOW.*

BUT AT LEAST *I'VE* KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THE ONES I *DID* GET.

WHAT DO I DO *NOW?*

WELL, YOU PROBABLY NEED TO PACK.

IT'S NOT THAT *EASY,* CLURACAN. YOU *GAVE* ME TO LORD *SHAPER.* WELL, OUR *LADY* DID. WELL, YOU *BOTH* DID.

I WAS A *PRESENT.* I WAS A *BRIBE.*

AND HE ACCEPTED ME.

HE'S *NOT* GOING TO JUST GIVE ME BACK BECAUSE YOU SAY TIME'S UP AND I WANT TO GO HOME.

I'LL *TELL* HIM THAT OUR QUEEN WON'T *MIND.* THEY'RE *OLD* FRIENDS -- MORE THAN *THAT,* PERHAPS, IF YOU LISTEN TO PALACE GOSSIP.

WE'LL ASK HIM TO SEND YOU BACK, AND HE'LL *WAVE* US ON OUR WAY.

AND WHILE WE'RE *AT* IT, I COULD ASK HIM TO DESTROY THE WILD HART.

*YOU'RE* THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN FIGHT THE HART, CLURACAN. AND IT'S *PROBABLY* NO LONGER EVEN IN THE *CASTLE.* PROBABLY NOT EVEN IN THE *DREAMING.*

I WISH YOU'D *THINK.*

=Sigh=

THE SHAPER *WON'T* LET ME GO. I *KNOW* HIM. HE'LL SAY *NO,* CLURACAN.

WELL THEN.

LET'S GO AND ASK HIM.

EEEEEE!

LYTA? LYTA. IT'S OKAY, HONEY. I'M HERE.

MMM. UHH. MMM.

LYTA?

WAKE UP. ARE YOU AWAKE? LYTA? I'M HERE. IT'S OKAY.

SHIT, GIRL. YOU'RE SCARING ME.

...CARLA?

YOU WERE SCREAMING. IN YOUR SLEEP.

I...I WAS?

UH-HUH.

YOU WANT TO TELL ME ABOUT IT?

I DON'T KNOW.

IT SEEMED SO REAL. IT SEEMED SO REAL.

WHAT DID?

I WOKE UP.

I KNOW THAT. I WOKE YOU--

NO. I MEAN, IN MY DREAM, I WOKE UP.

"I WOKE UP HEARING A NOISE. AND I SAT UP IN BED. IT WAS LIKE --

"I DON'T KNOW. WHEN YOU'RE DREAMING THERE ARE ALL THESE SENSES THAT YOU DON'T HAVE. YOU MIGHT SEE THINGS, HEAR THINGS. BUT YOU DON'T TOUCH, DON'T SMELL...

"I HAD ALL MY SENSES. I WAS *AWAKE*. I WAS HERE IN MY BEDROOM, AND I HEARD *WOMEN*--TALKING--DOWNSTAIRS--

"AND IT WAS LIKE I WAS A LITTLE *GIRL* AGAIN.

"I COULD HEAR WITCHES DOWNSTAIRS.

"*REAL* WITCHES. THE KINDS I WAS *SCARED* OF, WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL. THERE WERE WITCHES WHO WOULD EAT YOUR *HEART*. LIKE HANSEL AND GRETEL. *THOSE* KINDS OF WITCHES.

"AND I WAS REALLY *SCARED*. BUT I HAD TO GET UP.

"SO I WENT TO THE DOOR. TO THE LIVING ROOM. BUT THERE *WASN'T* A LIVING ROOM ANYMORE. JUST STAIRS DOWN.

"I WAS SO *SCARED*.

"I WAS SO *DREAD-FULLY* SCARED."

ARE YOU *SURE* IT'S A FINGER? IT'S VERY *SMALL*.

DITCH-DELIVERED?

IT WAS A VERY SMALL BABY.

*AND* BIRTH-STRANGLED. *JUST* LIKE IT SAYS IN THE RECIPE.

AHH. *HERE* SHE IS. HERE'S THE LITTLE LADY NOW.

COME ON DOWN, MY DEARIE-DUCK.

WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU, GRANDDAUGHTER.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT THERE WAS A DOWN-STAIRS, HERE.

THERE'S A DOWNSTAIRS IN EVERYBODY. THAT'S WHERE *WE* LIVE.

I'M DREAMING.

YOU'RE *NOT.*

ARE YOU GOING TO HURT ME?

*HURT* YOU? OF *COURSE* WE'RE GOING TO HURT YOU. EVERYBODY GETS HURT.

BUT WE'RE ALSO GOING TO *HELP* YOU, MY POPSY. YOUR BABBIE *HAS* BEEN STOLEN FROM YOU, AFTER ALL.

TOO *PROUD* TO HAVE A DAUGHTER, EH? *HAD* TO HAVE A SON.

*DANIEL!* WHERE *IS* HE? DID YOU THREE *TAKE* HIM?

I'LL THANK YOU NOT TO USE THAT TONE OF VOICE WITH *US,* YOUNG LADY.

YOUNG LADY? *ME?* JESUS. LIKE HOW OLD ARE *YOU,* BIMBO?

A LITTLE OLDER THAN MY TEETH AND AS OLD AS MY TONGUE.

I WASN'T TALKING TO *YOU.* I WAS TALKING TO *HER.*

YOU WERE TALKING TO *US,* GRANDDAUGHTER.

I'VE HAD *ENOUGH* OF HER. SHE'S *HAD* HER THREE QUESTIONS. SHE'S *WASTED* THEM. SHE HASN'T EVEN GOT HER MOTHER'S SPARK.

MY MOTHER? YOU KNEW MY MOTHER?

NOT TALKING TO *YOU* ANYMORE. WHERE'S THE TIGER'S CHAUDRON?

WHAT'S A CHAUDRON?

GUTS. ENTRAILS.

I THOUGHT IT WAS A COLOR. AH. *HERE* IT IS. BIT SMELLY, THOUGH.

HOLD ON. YOU *DIDN'T* ANSWER *ALL* MY QUESTIONS.

YOU *DIDN'T* TELL ME WHERE *DANIEL* IS. I ASKED YOU *THAT*.

THOSE WHO *ASK* DON'T *GET*.

AND THOSE WHO *DON'T* ASK DON'T *WANT*. HEE! HEE!

YOU'RE RIGHT.

DANIEL'S BEEN *TAKEN* FROM YOU. YOU'VE MET ALREADY THOSE WHO TOOK HIM.

WHERE IS HE RIGHT NOW?

THEY'RE GOING TO PUT HIM IN THE FIRE, MY LITTLE DIDDLY-POUT.

WHAT?

CHOP CHOP CHOP CHOP

THAT'S A *LOT* MORE THAN THREE QUESTIONS. "*WHAT?*" INDEED. HERE -- HAVE A PORKIE PIE INSTEAD.

IT--IT'S COVERED IN *MUD*.

EVERYONE'S GOT TO EAT A PECK OF DIRT BEFORE THEY DIE.

GRANDDAUGHTER, WE *DO* WANT TO HELP YOU.

THIS WAS THE *FIRST* TIME. THERE WILL BE TWO MORE.

NOW, *POP* HER IN THE *POT*. LET'S SEE WHAT SHE'S MADE OF.

NOOOOO!

...IT WAS ONE OF THOSE MOMENTS THAT WENT ON FOREVER.

Y'KNOW, I COULD EVEN *SMELL* THE *STENCH* FROM THE CAULDRON. I COULD FEEL THE *HEAT*.

AND THEN -- *YOU* WERE HOLDING ME.

JESUS. WHAT A *NIGHT-MARE*. HERE.

CARLA. YOU *GOTTA* STOP MAKING ME COFFEE. IT'S NOT THAT I'M UNGRATEFUL, BUT I NEVER TAKE MORE THAN A COUPLA SIPS.

IT'S WHAT MY MOMMA USED TO DO. WHEN THERE WAS A CRISIS. SHE'D MAKE COFFEE.

AND THIS IS DEFINITELY A CRISIS.

WELL, NOW WE'VE GOT THOSE TWO REFUGEES FROM *DRAGNET* ON THE CASE, WITH THE MIGHT OF THE ENTIRE *LAPD* BEHIND THEM.

THEY SEEMED PRETTY COMPETENT.

THEY SEEMED LIKE *JERKS*.

LYTA. HONEY. I WONDER... MAYBE THOSE WITCHES IN YOUR NIGHTMARE WERE YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS, TRYING TO *TELL* YOU SOMETHING.

I DON'T *TRUST* DREAMS.

THEY *SAID* THEY *WEREN'T* DREAMS.

SO? DREAMS LIE.

AND DO YOU THINK *THIS* DREAM WAS LYING TO YOU?

CARLA, THEY SAID THEY'D COME AND *SEE* ME AGAIN. THEY SAID DANIEL WAS ON *FIRE*.

AND TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, I DON'T KNOW *WHICH* SCARES ME MORE.

"WELL, WHAT DO WE DO NOW?"

"WE TALK TO HIM, I SUPPOSE."

"OF COURSE WE TALK TO HIM, SISTER. I WAS NOT PROPOSING TO WRITE HIM A LETTER. SO WHERE SHALL WE FIND YOUR ERSTWHILE LORD AND MASTER?"

I DON'T KNOW. I NEVER HAD TO SEE HIM BEFORE.

WELL, SOMEBODY MUST KNOW.

EXCUSE ME, MY FRIENDS?

YES?

WE NEED TO TALK TO THE LORD SHAPER.

TO LORRD MORRRPHEUS? RRREALLY?

HOW DO WE GO ABOUT DOING THIS?

YOU'LL NEED TO SEEK AN AUDIENCE.

OH. HOW DO WE DO THAT?

I DON'T KNOW. DO YOU, MY SWEET?

NO, RUTHVEN.

WE'VE NEVER SOUGHT ONE, YOU SEE.

HAVE YOU ASKED LUCIEN? HE MIGHT HAVE A BOOK ON PALACE PROTOCOL.

THANK YOU KINDLY. YOU'VE BOTH BEEN MOST HELPFUL.

AU RRREVOIR.

WE COULD SUMMON HIM.

I...I WOULD NOT...I...

HM. WHICH WAY IS THE THRONE ROOM?

ALONG THERE.

IT'S CLOSED. I'VE NEVER SEEN IT CLOSED BEFORE.

SO? WE CAN ALWAYS KNOCK ON IT.

I DON'T THINK HE'D LIKE THAT.

CLURACAN? LET US GO BACK TO MY QUARTERS. YOUR OTHER IDEA WAS SO GOOD. LET'S SEND HIM A FORMAL LETTER--

NONSENSE.

THDUD!

THDUD!

THDUD!

HOLA! LORD SHAPER?

IT IS I, THE CLURACAN, DUKE OF THE YARROW AND THE FLAY, FEORIN-CAPTAIN OF ALL THE GHOLES, ALSO ENVOY-IN- EXTRA-ORDINARY TO HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN OF FAERIE.

I AM HERE WITH MY SISTER, THE LADY NUALA, CURRENTLY IN YOUR SERVICE.

WE DESIRE AUDIENCE.

SEE? NOTHING HAPPENED. NOW--LET US RETURN TO MY QUARTERS AND--

OH. OH DEAR.

HE'S NOT HERE.

WE CAN CALL HIM.

MY LORD SHAPER? WE CRAVE AUDIENCE.

Indeed?

Hello, Cluracan.

GOOD DAY, LORD SHAPER.

And to you, Duke of the Yarrow and the Flay, Feorin-Captain of all the Gholes, also envoy-in-extraordinary to Her Majesty the Queen of Faerie.

So. You seek an audience.

YES.

Why are you here, Cluracan?

I AM NOT HERE FOR MYSELF, SIRE, BUT FOR MY SISTER, THE LADY NUALA.

I see.

Your sister has served me well, Cluracan.

AS YOU SAID TO ME WHEN *LAST* WE SPOKE, SIRE, SHE HAS A GOOD HEART.

I said that to you, Cluracan?

YES, SIRE.

Well, it is a truth.

I am somewhat older than the fairy folk, Cluracan. But I have long had a fondness for them. You have entertained me.

Like me, your people live by strict rules, and binding traditions--although your ways are not my ways.

MY LORD, I HAVE COME TO ASK A *FAVOR* OF YOU. IT CONCERNS A GIFT.

A gift? Hmmm...

Fairy gifts traditionally are double-edged knives.

AND ARE YOUR *OWN* GIFTS ALWAYS WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE, SIRE?

You are a rogue, Cluracan. But you are an amusing rogue.

I notice you stepped off my path, when you came to this place.

I DID THAT THING, SIRE. I APOLOGIZE. IT WAS A MOST *FOOLISH* THING TO DO.

SIRE, I, UH, INADVERTENTLY... FREED AN... *ANIMAL* WHEN I DID THAT. I WAS WONDERING, IF YOU *RAN* INTO IT, IF IT'S NOT TOO MUCH TROUBLE, POSSIBLY YOU COULD...

Destroy your nemesis, Cluracan? No. It is no longer in the Dreaming; and it is not mine to destroy.

Is that the favor you wished to ask of me?

NO, SIRE.

THE LADY NUALA. SHE WAS A GIFT TO YOU, FROM MY QUEEN.

I HAVE COME TO ASK IF SHE CAN RETURN TO FAERIE WITH ME...

AS I WAS THE ONE WHO GAVE HER TO YOU, I WAS THE ONE WHO FELT IT WAS TIME TO ASK YOU FOR HER BACK. SHE IS MUCH MISSED--HER CHEERY WAYS, HER WITTY JESTS... YOU KNOW HOW IT IS.

I see. And what does the lady Nuala say about all this?

SIR?

I--YOU'VE BEEN VERY *KIND*, SIR. FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS I--SIR.

I AM *YOURS*. WHAT *YOU* WISH IS ALSO WHAT *I* WISH.

I see. And Cluracan, what does your Queen say?

SIRE, IT SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD THAT I AM HERE AS A PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL, REPRESENTING ONLY MYSELF.

I AM NOT HERE TO SPEAK FOR MY QUEEN.

You try my patience, fairy. What does Titania say?

SPEAKING INFORMALLY, I CAN STATE THAT HER MAJESTY WOULD VIEW THE IDEA OF THE RETURN OF THE LADY NUALA WITH UNMIXED PLEASURE.

I see.

Hm. The palace staff are my responsibility, Cluracan.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR *MANY* THINGS, SIRE.

Yes.

Very well. You may return to Faerie, Nuala.

Is there anything you wish to take with you?

WHAT?

Is there anything you wish to take away with you, Nuala?

N-NO.

Very well.

I would like formally to thank you for your service, these last three years. Give me your pendant.

WHAT?

Your pendant.

HERE.

There. For your service. A gift. If in need, hold the stone with both hands, and call me. I will come to you; you may have one boon.

OH.

You desire more than that?

OH. NO. THANK YOU, SIR. THAT'S...

...VERY KIND.

Very well. This audience is at an end. Your horse, Cluracan, is fed and ready. Nuala, I have taken the liberty of furnishing you with a mare. Release her when you reach the borders of faerie.

Farewell.

WELL--*THAT* WAS EASY, WASN'T IT? I DIDN'T EXPECT IT WAS GOING TO BE *THAT* EASY. I HAD EXPECTED THAT HE WOULD AT *LEAST* DEMAND TRIBUTE OF SOME KIND.

*WHAT* DID HE SAY TO YOU ABOUT THE *PENDANT*? I COULDN'T HEAR HIM. OR UNDERSTAND HIM. OR SOMETHING.

NOTHING. HE JUST TOUCHED IT.

SO. NOW WE GO HOME.

ABOUT TIME, TOO.

NUALA?

NUALA, YOU'RE *CRYING*.

H-HE DIDN'T EVEN *TRY* TO FIGHT FOR ME, BROTHER.

HE DIDN'T CARE IF I STAYED OR I WENT.

EXACTLY.

AND I CANNOT *TELL* YOU HOW RELIEVED I AM. NOW: LET'S GO HOME.

TO BE CONTINUED

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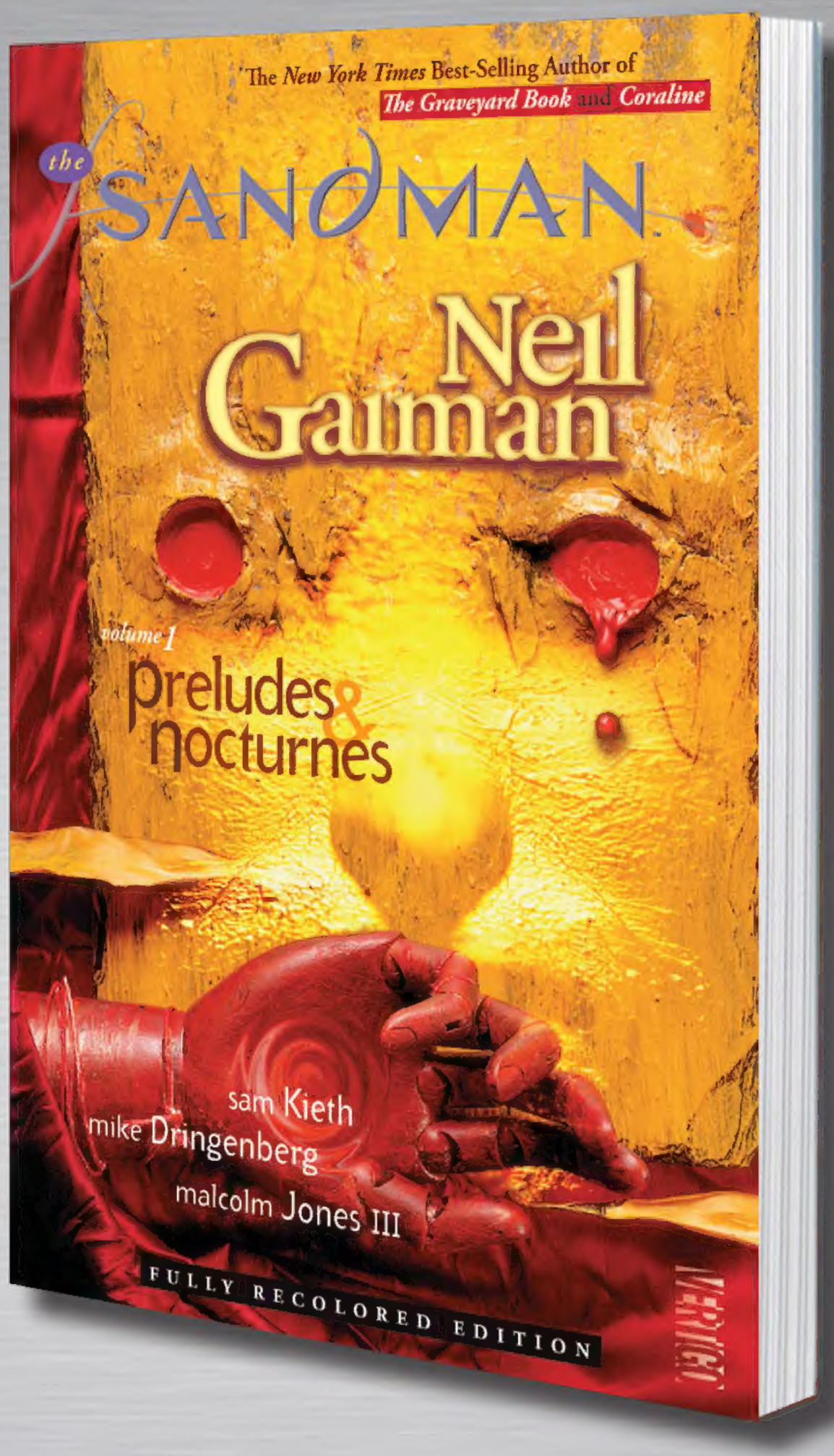


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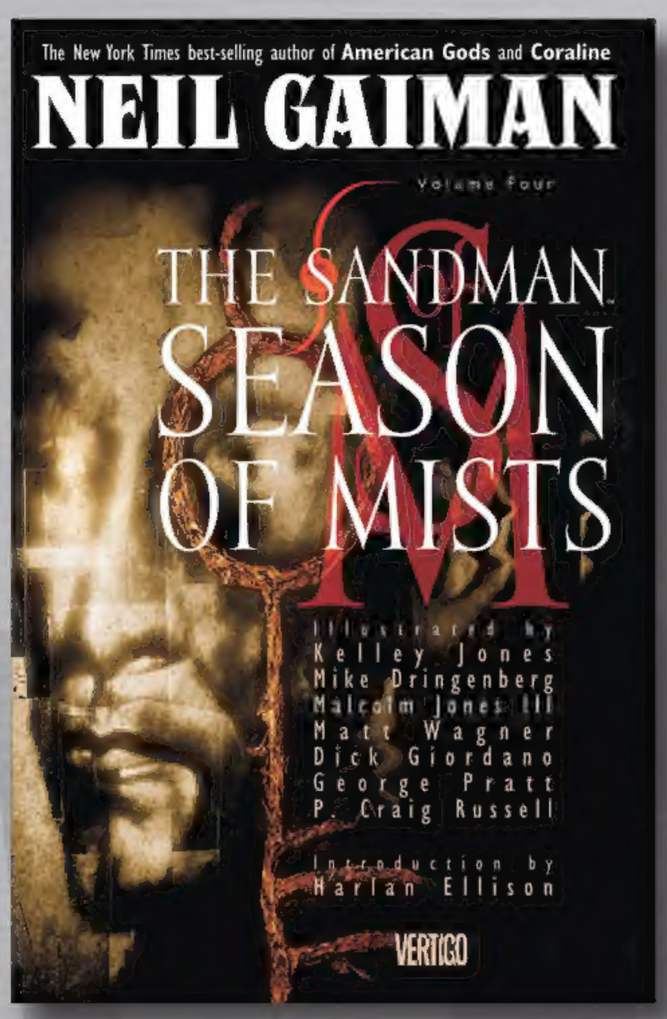


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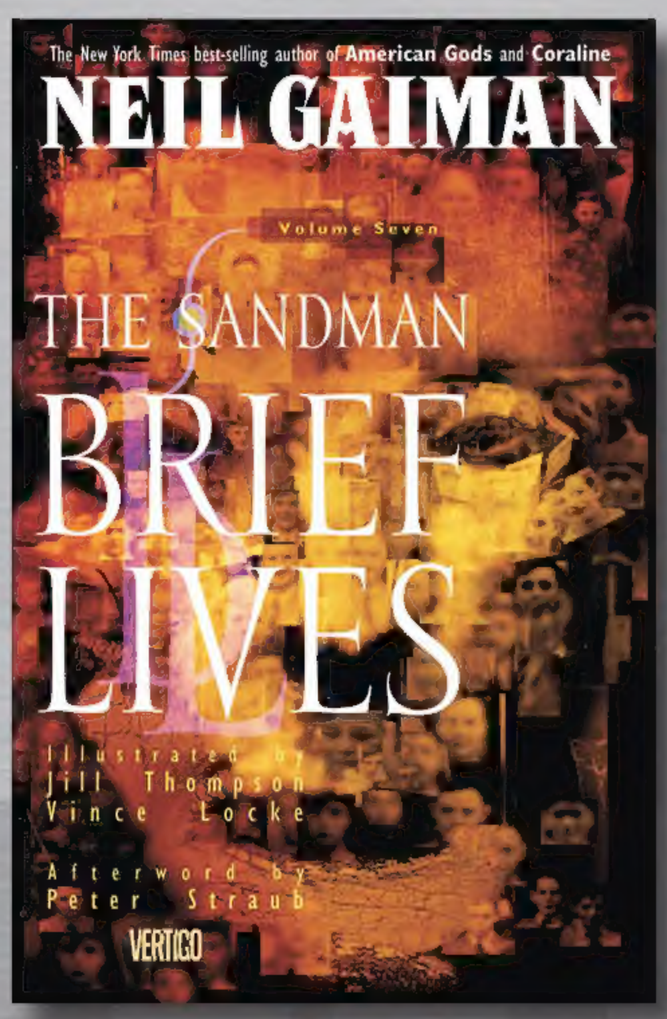


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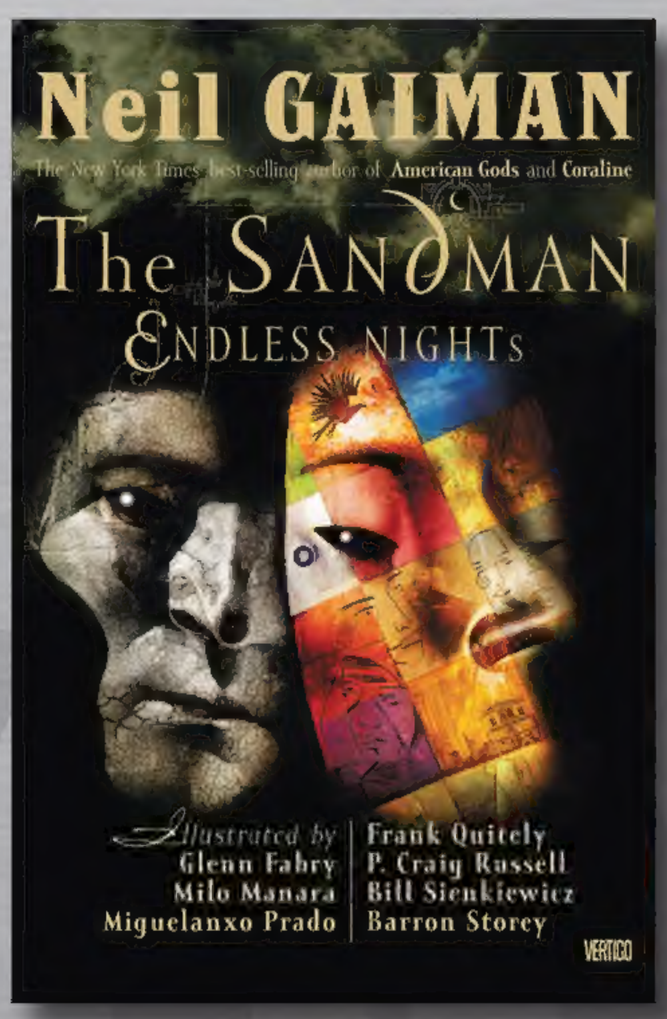


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